

## HERMANN HESS'S SIDDHARTHA: A KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALIST STUDY

<sup>1</sup>Ayesha Aftab, <sup>2</sup>Syed Hanif Rasool

<sup>1</sup>M.Phil (Qurtuba University Peshawar)

[ayeshaaftab@gmail.com](mailto:ayeshaaftab@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor Department of English Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak

[syedhanifrasool@kkkuk.edu.pk](mailto:syedhanifrasool@kkkuk.edu.pk)

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Corresponding Author: \*

Syed Hanif Rasool

### Abstract

This paper explores Siddhartha's walk toward existential authenticity in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*. It demonstrates how the hero's deep understanding of existential anguish, ethical accountability and spiritual rebirth affects his personal characteristics and the complexity of the work. The paper argues that the protagonist's odyssey is akin to a Kierkegaardian existential quest for meaning and identity in life. The path that Kierkegaard suggests, as Reith assumes, corresponds to the way Siddhartha traveled through life and found his own individual truth in all the three spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, by the end. This paper uses textual analysis method to explore how the story of Siddhartha reflects Kierkegaardian philosophy with regard to the conflicts of religion, hedonism and moral duty. This study is an attempt to demonstrate the approach of the protagonist, Siddhartha, to existential self-realization as a response to certain general concerns of human longing, divine existence, and the diversity of choices available to him. Findings: The implications are that the pilgrimage motif of Siddhartha's spiritual journey exhibits the transition from the aesthetic to the religious stage, stressing the importance of individual belief and personal experience. By offering perspectives on humanity and the search for meaning, this contributes to existing discussions about existentialism, spirituality, and personal growth.

## INTRODUCTION

In the novel, *Siddhartha*, a young Indian in the time of the Buddha, leaves his wealthy but unsatisfying home in search of truth. The novel is inspired by the early life and the philosophy of Gautama Buddha, and follows his search for illumination, along with the man named Siddhartha. He comes into the lives of others in different guises: as a wealthy merchant, a devoted follower of meditation, a practicing ascetic, a lover, and as a ferryman and father. As Siddhartha tunes into the rhythms of nature, he rises above conventional roles and forms, and becomes one with the universe, and is seen to mirror the wisdom in the stream. The story encompasses inner growth over a lifetime, and focuses on the significance of self-discovery and personal growth. The book shows that one can only find enlightenment through one's own experience, not from even a great teacher as Siddhārtha once demonstrated. True self-awareness and inner peace come from creating your own way. Hesse follows Siddhartha's spiritual quest, making the point that the unraveling of Siddhartha happens via his ceaseless quest and also how each new stage of life and new experience allows to see anew how material life and spiritual life contort with each other.

The internal quest of Siddhartha is somewhat plotless, but it increases in intensity as it moves upwards to the point where he reaches a higher plane of existence. Siddhartha dies and is resurrected many times over the course of the story. It is a conception which corresponds wonderfully to the existence of an individual, that is the knowledge of one's self and the eternity of the end which Siddhartha eventually has. For Hesse, a writer who takes the heterodox person to its extremities, the great tension in the book concerns Siddhartha's personal battles in the face of these spiritual predicaments. The fact that Siddhartha chooses to drop out of traditional religious disciplines in the early part of his path indicates that enlightenment is nowhere to be found outside of oneself. The fact that Siddhartha turned his back on contemporary spirituality at the beginning of his quest, suggests that enlightenment is not something that can be external guided. As a young Brahmin, Siddhartha performs the ritual sacrifices and takes part in the worship of the deities and in cycle of samsara (the endless cycle of birth and rebirth), his people guide him toward such rituals and the appearance of the Illustrious One (Gautama Buddha) to claim such a high worthiness, his father and the

community already views him as having. When Siddhartha makes the decision to leave his family and the Samanas, it is a defining moment as he searches for his

own means to achieve enlightenment. Once the Samanas' methods prove fruitless, he and his friend Govinda set out to search for Gotama, the Buddha, but even Buddha's teachings may not be the key to enlightenment. The encounter deepens Siddhartha's understanding of what it takes to reach enlightenment, and substantiates his suspicion that true enlightenment cannot be taught, but must be personally experienced.

Life is a process, and meaning and purpose is something we constantly search for in our lives. The Siddhartha of Hesse takes an agonized recurrence of those levels and dulls it repeatedly. This interpretation assumes that the journey of the hero represents a Kierkegaardian existential quest for the meaning of life. Hesse's portrayal of Siddhartha's quest from the aesthetic, to the ethical, to the religious, manifests the cycles of existence presented by Kierkegaard in his three stages of life. According to this study, Siddhartha's experiences correlate to these three existential stages, aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual; leading him to his spiritual awakenings and realization of ultimate truth. The protagonist's quest seeks to confront the existential dilemmas about human

life and the divine, showing the contrasting positions within his existential quest for self-realization.

### Research Objectives

1. To explore the protagonist's life journey replicating Kierkegaard's concept of three stages of life in Hesse's *Siddhartha*.
2. To identify and analyze the protagonist's journey projected to resolve the larger questions of human quest and divine existence in the selected novel.
3. To highlight the existentialist journey of the protagonist in quest for self-realization in the selected novel.

### Research Questions

The following queries will be addressed by the study:

1. What are the stages of the protagonist's life journey that replicate Kierkegaard's concept of three stages of life in Hesse's *Siddhartha*?
2. How does the protagonist's journey resolve the larger questions of human quest and divine existence in the selected novel?
3. Why does the protagonist seek to partake in his existentialist journey in quest for the self-realization in the selected novel?

### Significance of the Study

Human perspectives on existence are incredibly diverse, reflecting the uniqueness of each individual. Despite attempts to unify understanding, people remain distinct, unable to achieve a singular, all-encompassing viewpoint due to their inherent human limitations. As individuals become aware of these constraints, they may ponder the reasons behind their restricted perception, such as seeing only three dimensions despite the existence of multiple dimensions. These cognitive and perceptual limitations are fundamental to the human experience, shaping our understanding of the world.

Humans have looked everywhere for answers, but often ignore their own inner selves. We try to find purpose in things that don't matter and in subjects like science and math, but can't find what we're looking for. Some parts of life can't be measured or understood, so meaning stays hard to find, and humans keep wondering about life's big questions. Humans are still trying to figure out how to connect with the mysterious and unknowable parts of life. This idea is important because it suggests there's more to life than just basic needs. There might be a deeper level of existence for people who've answered a higher call. It seems like there's something missing,

or else we wouldn't keep searching despite having all the material things we need.

Kierkegaard's ideas and Hesse's *Siddhartha* remain relevant today because they address universal human concerns like identity, morality, and spirituality. They speak to the contemporary search for meaning and spiritual fulfillment. Authenticity is linked with personal experiences and introspection. The levels of human development: aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual, are examined as well and reveal the significance of the existential philosophy as the foundation of our reality. The research emphasizes the importance of self-reflection, personal experience and self-consciousness as essential ingredients to true authenticity. It is thus also a treasure in the fusion of literary and philosophical insight, with which it does great justice to the human state.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on textual and critical analyses this armchair study probes into the cross-connections between Kierkegaard-on-Existence (read Existential) and Hesse's *"Siddhartha"*. The approach is a discussion of the narrative structure, character development and philosophical intentions of the novel, based on Kierkegaard's three stages of life; the aesthetic, ethical and religious life. The review seeks out specific passages, conversations, and key events in

Siddhartha's experience which resonate with each stage and have been derived through close reading references to the text. The sections of critical inquiry closely investigate Kierkegaard's existential construct, particularly his ideas of subjective truth, leap of faith, and the authentic self, to establish a theoretical standpoint from which to read the novel. This split perspective enables us to consider Hesse from both a literary and a philosophical perspective, as we delve into the ways in which fiction might depict existential concepts. Siddhartha's spiritual evolution—progressing from hedonistic indulgence, through ascetic discipline and to enlightened understanding—is the focus of most of the novel, and is in fact parallel and possibly oppositional to stages in Kierkegaard's development. This methodological model aims to show how literature can work as a medium of existential philosophy, as it makes use of textual proof to discuss the concrete existence of the theoretical in the experience of a character. The interpretation is always critical and explores the parallels and discordances between Hesse's literary creation of enlightenment and Kierkegaard's understanding of true existence. Through a systematic utilization of Kierkegaard's existential categories on Siddhartha's quest, it provides an account of the existential significance and complexity of the novel that is both organized and

refined.

### KIERKEGAARD'S THREE STAGES OF LIFE

Søren Kierkegaard, who is often called the father of existentialism, said that people go through three different stages of existence—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious—on their way to becoming their true selves. Spiritual growth, on the other hand, needs conscious choice and personal commitment. Physical growth happens on its own. Each stage signifies an enhanced degree of self-awareness and engagement with existence, culminating in a fully actualized individuality before God.

The aesthetic stage is the first one, and it is marked by a life that is focused on sensory experiences, pleasure, and instant satisfaction. People in this stage look for new and exciting things to do to keep from getting bored. Kierkegaard differentiates between two types of aesthetic existence: the immediate and the reflective. The immediate aesthete lives only for the present, enjoying short-lived pleasures without thinking about them more deeply. They are not stable because they go from one desire to another and never stick to values that will last. The reflective aesthete, despite being more cultured—possibly engaged in art, music, or intellectual endeavors—remains ensnared in a disjointed existence, where life is diminished to a succession

of unrelated experiences. The aesthetic stage's main problem is that it is empty by nature. It ultimately leads to despair because it doesn't have any meaning, commitment, or responsibility. Kierkegaard contends that although all individuals must navigate this phase, persistence within it hinders authentic self-realization. The aesthete's unwillingness to make significant choices renders them unmoored, incapable of constructing a coherent identity.

Moving to the ethical stage means going from being self-centered to being responsible for others. In this situation, people see themselves as part of a bigger group and follow moral rules. The ethical person, on the other hand, embraces duty in family, work, or civic life. The aesthete, on the other hand, avoids commitment. They know what's right and wrong and try to live virtuously by following the rules of society. Kierkegaard exemplifies this stage via the archetype of the married man—a dutiful husband, father, and public servant who adheres to moral responsibilities. He also points out the flaws in this stage, though. Even though living ethically gives you structure and purpose, it is still limited by universal rules that don't take into account how unique each person is. The identity of an ethical individual is characterized by roles (parent, spouse, citizen) that are universally applicable,

thereby leaving the issue of personal authenticity unaddressed. The ethical stage also doesn't take into account the fact that people can sin. When people inevitably fail to meet moral standards, they feel guilty and realize that they can't reach perfection just by trying hard. This moral failure crisis pushes them into the third stage, which is the religious stage.

The religious stage is the highest level of existence, where people go beyond universal morals and form a personal relationship with God. The ethical stage is based on rational morality, but the religious stage requires a "leap of faith," which is an irrational, subjective commitment that can't be explained logically. Kierkegaard uses the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible to show this: Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son contradicts ethical reasoning yet exemplifies unwavering faith in God's will.

At this point, the person is alone with God, free from the rules of society. Truth is based on personal belief rather than objective proof. Kierkegaard stresses that real Christianity isn't about rules and beliefs set by institutions; it is about having a deep passion for God and giving yourself up to Him. This stage alleviates the despair inherent in the aesthetic and ethical phases by presenting a transcendent purpose. Kierkegaard's three stages show how one moves

from shallow pleasure to moral duty and then to existential faith. The aesthetic stage is characterized by fragmentation, the ethical stage by duty-bound conformity, and the religious stage by radical individuality before God. The religious stage is the only way to reach true selfhood. This is where you accept guilt, embrace paradox, and commit to a personal, subjective truth that goes beyond reason. Kierkegaard asserts that genuine existence transcends adherence to external regulations; it entails the audacity to live with passion and authenticity. The religious stage, despite appearing irrational, constitutes the sole avenue to authentic freedom and self-actualization. His philosophy encourages people to go beyond what society expects of them and face the ultimate question of meaning through a personal connection with the divine.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* is one of those rare printed treasure that could simultaneously be a most beautiful childhood dream and a very fresh, imaginative, and deep revelation for an adult. It really forces you to think what it's like to be spiritually enlightened and your own self-realization. The book's date of composition was 1922, and it was created during a period of drastic cultural and spiritual deterioration caused by the First World War in Europe; In his novel, Hesse

managed to capture the essence of that era when everybody was attempting to come to terms with what it means to be human. The story of the Brahmin son who renounces worldly comforts to seek his own way has echoed throughout cultures and generations, resulting in a rich and complex body of scholarship that continues to grow almost a century after publication.

The existential interpretation of *Siddhartha* is perhaps the most influential critical position taken on the work, many scholars have explored how Hesse's protagonist personifies key existential beliefs. As the comparative study of Camus' *The Stranger* by Shweta Kapoor (2019) illustrates, the novels share in the depiction of an individual search for meaning in an apparently indifferent world with *Siddhartha* collectively arriving at a more positive conclusion than the absurdist one of Camus. Imran and Iftikhar (2014) further develop this existential explanation by emphasizing *Siddhartha*'s audacious claim to personal freedom; his denial of both the Buddhist doctrine and the traditions of the Brahmin demonstrate an existential emphasis on individuality in place of institutionalized dogma. Priced at more academic expectations regarding philosophical orientation, Padmarani Rao's (2019) scholarship also forms a significant philosophical background in tracing the history of existential

thought from its Cartesian beginnings and further Kierkegaard and Nietzsche postulations as well as the compelling dialectical dynamic between Western existentialist emphasis on individual will and Eastern philosophical emphasis of ego transcendence. This tension becomes most evident in Siddhartha's final insight, when his hard-earned sense of individuality appears to merge with a sense of universal unity. This, in essence, is Hesse's attempt to reconcile these two ostensibly contradictory perspectives.

The book's engagement with Eastern spiritual traditions has prompted extensive academic discussion, as part of broader postcolonial anxieties about cultural representation and borrowing. This comprehensive study by Zubayer Alam (2018) demonstrates that Hesse was deeply engaged with Hindu and Buddhist concepts, in particular with the Upanishadic idea of Atman (the true self) and the Buddhist way to enlightenment. However, Catherine Benton (1997) has an excellent critique of Hesse who, in her opinion, misrepresents many of the most basic Buddhist principles, most notably Siddhartha's final rejection of the teachings of the Buddha in favour of personal experience. This criticism raises large questions about the ethics of cross cultural representation in literature, especially given the novel remains the

most widely read introduction to Eastern philosophy for many in the West. Hui-fen Hsu (2021) provides a mediating reading of the novel as a calculation instance of interwovenness between European Romanticism and Buddhist philosophy, exhibiting what she argues is the spiritual syncretism of modernity rather than claiming to be representative of traditional Buddhism. Such an approach acknowledges the novel's cultural specificity and its value as literature, not sacred text.

Psychological interpretations of Siddhartha's awakening have lent deep insights into the novel's treatment of consciousness and the self. Elly Christina Hutu Bessy's adaptation of Rogers' Humanistic Psychology (2019), on the other hand, considers Siddhartha's path as a road toward self-actualization, and explores how different stages from professorship to indolence lead to his final psychological equilibrium. Imran, Bhatti, and Naveed (2018) used Dombrowski's positive disintegration theory to examine Siddhartha's crises as indispensable disintegrations preceding higher level of personality integration. This is diametrically opposed to the prevailing notion that to go hunting for the spirit is evidence of mental illness. Jungian analysis Emanuel Maier (2008) revealed the deep archetypal structures of the story, the

novel is (among other things) a story about what Maier terms "the individuation of the prototypical hero (slaying the dragon, marrying the princess, becoming king)," although he also believed it possible to interpret at least one of the characters in Hesse's novel in terms of the Jungian persona (Vasudeva the ferryman as the carrier of the "collective unconscious" leading Siddhartha to completion). Together, these psychological frameworks demonstrate how Hesse's narrative anticipates many developments in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Reading the novel through Formalist and narratological lenses has brought out Hesse's sophisticated literary devices, such as his use of narrative perspective to mirror Siddhartha's evolving awareness. Rafia Khan, Maria Ghani, and Muhammad Ajmal's use of Genette's narratology (2024) show how Hesse's use of internal focalization deepens the psychological intimacy as readers can witness Siddhartha's development from within.

Thus the novel's structural imagery, reflected in its deliberate pacing and contemplative rhythm, mimics on a formal level the meditative nature of Siddhartha's quest, in what some scholars have described as a "literary mandala"—a device which serves as a wholeness-generating mechanism, both in an artistic, textual form and on an existential level. Feminist critiques,

especially Diksha Koirala's sharp analysis (2013), have added much-needed balance to the mostly male-centered readings of the book. Koirala shows how female characters like Kamala and Siddhartha's unnamed mother mostly serve as tools for male growth, with their own subjectivity mostly missing from the story. This viewpoint uncovers the patriarchal assumptions inherent in Hesse's depiction of enlightenment and a significant portion of the novel's reception history, prompting readers to reflect on the elements of human experience that may be omitted from Siddhartha's ostensibly universal enlightenment.

Deconstructive readings have further complicated traditional interpretations by exposing the novel's subversion of binary oppositions. Justin Philip Cherian's Derridean analysis (2018) illustrates how Siddhartha's enlightenment ultimately obliterates traditional distinctions between spiritual and material existence, whereas Harsh Bhardwaj's study (2017) interrogates the novel's ostensible moral dichotomies, demonstrating how Siddhartha's "immoral" phase is crucial to his eventual realization. These methods show that the novel has surprising postmodern elements, which foreshadow later philosophical questions about how meaning and identity can change.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The wide range of critical readings of *Siddhartha*, from existentialist and Eastern philosophical readings to psychological, feminist, narratological, and deconstructive readings, shows how rich and complex the novel is. Instead of cancelling each other out, these different points of view show how Hesse's deceptively simple story has many layers, giving different readers from different cultures and times different ideas. The lack of a thorough Kierkegaardian interpretation, as indicated in the conclusion, points to a potential avenue for future research that could connect the novel's existential themes with its spiritual aspects. This approach might show how Siddhartha's stages of growth—from being interested in art to being morally responsible to being religiously transcendent—both reflect and change Kierkegaard's ideas, creating a new blend of Western existentialism and Eastern enlightenment philosophy. As the ongoing proliferation of scholarly interpretations illustrates, *Siddhartha* persists as not merely a literary artefact of its era but as a dynamic text that continues to provoke, challenge, and inspire successive generations of readers and critics.

## THE AESTHETIC SIDDHARTHA

Kierkegaard's prophetic words, "I comprehend everything rather well; there are two options available: doing this or doing that," carry a lot of

weight about the choice of existence. In simple terms, "you will regret it whether you choose to do it or not" (Kierkegaard, 2004).—an intellectual quandary that not only initiates but also fundamentally influences Siddhartha's transformative odyssey as he shifts from asceticism to worldly engagement. Having crossed this existential threshold, Siddhartha is drawn to the sensual embrace of the city, where his interactions with Kamala and other locals show that he is starting to understand that spirituality alone cannot lead to enlightenment. This intentional abandonment of his ascetic practices for worldly pleasures signifies not mere indulgence but a purposeful exploration of alternative avenues to wisdom, through which Kamala unveils facets of his identity that remained elusive even under the tutelage of Brahmins, Samanas, and Gotama. But this very awakening is a paradox: it broadens his understanding while at the same time taking away the deeper meaning he seeks, leaving a void that drives him to keep looking.

Siddhartha's spiritual emptiness continues even as his journey leads him to a fateful meeting with a ferryman, who takes him across the river to the city where Kamala's beautiful presence immediately captivates him. Siddhartha sees Kamala not just as a lover but also as a possible teacher in the arts of love. He knows that to win

her over, he needs to show her that he is valuable in material terms. This makes Kamala push him towards the merchant's life and get him an apprenticeship with Kamaswami. Siddhartha quickly becomes rich and indulgent while learning about business from Kamaswami during the day and sensuality from Kamala at night. He tries every pleasure that money can buy, from drinking to gambling. But because he is emotionally detached, these experiences are empty and his life is just a pointless game that doesn't touch his spirit. This very detachment keeps him in a cycle of increasing sensual excess as he tries to numb his growing existential sadness. This cycle of unhappiness eventually brings Siddhartha back to the forest, where he meets Gotama again by chance. This makes him think critically about the Buddha's teachings on cosmic unity through cause and effect. Siddhartha finds these doctrines intellectually compelling, but he believes they are fundamentally limited in their ability to convey the actual experience of enlightenment. He realises that "Through lectures, you will be unable to put into words what has happened to you at the hour of enlightenment" (Hesse, 1922). This reinforces his belief that true wisdom must be personally experienced rather than taught. Siddhartha is haunted by Gotama's mysterious smile after they part ways. This smile is a powerful

symbol of self-discovery that stays with him and comes up again and again on his journey as a way to understand.

Building on these thoughts, Siddhartha keeps thinking about how teachers can't teach about the nature of the self—"Now, he had to experience himself" (Hesse, 1922, p. 43)—which is a realisation that goes along with his growing appreciation for physical reality. His new way of looking at things, which he summed up by saying that "Nothing could be achieved by killing the random self of the senses" (Hesse, 1922, p. 43), shows a clear change from his earlier view that the material world was just an illusion (*maya*) to a more engaged experience of the present moment. This change reaches its peak in a ferryman's hut at night, when Govinda has a dream that he is becoming a woman. This dream marks the end of his ascetic past and the beginning of his full embrace of sensual engagement.

When Siddhartha meets a village woman whose temptations he first resists, he eventually gives in completely when he meets Kamala, whose sophisticated beauty immediately captivates him. He knows that his rough looks will make people laugh at him, so he changes his appearance by cutting his hair, shaving, and putting on nice clothes. Then he goes up to her and humbly asks, "Why can't I accomplish the objective I set for

myself yesterday, which is to become the friend of Kamala and discover the delights of love from her?" (Hesse, 1922). Kamala, who values material things, sets clear requirements for her students: nice clothes, shoes, and gifts. She looks down on the former Samana's desire for carnal knowledge with a sense of humour. She will only agree to teach him if he can prove that he is as good as Kamaswami in business. This sets the stage for the next part of his worldly education.

When asked about his qualifications, Siddhartha first talks about his Samana roots, such as fasting, waiting, and thinking. But in the end, his ability to read and write gets him a partnership with the rich merchant Kamaswami. Kamala hints that he could take the place of the old merchant, but Siddhartha is still only focused on his main goal: learning how to love with Kamala's help. He lives up to the promise of his name, "one who attains his goal," and carries on with this sexual education, which he pursues resolutely, maintaining a few of the rules of Samana even as he dives headlong into pleasure. This encapsulation of his submerged identity represents an abandonment of the spiritual path and the arrival at what has been suppressed till now (Kamala's etymological link to the Hindu god of love and desire, Kama, is no coincidence) and is a vital moment in his path of enlightening self-

discovery.

According to Kierkegaard's conception of the aesthetic sphere, one which denotes a life of sensuous desires and indulgences, what Siddhartha is now clearly ready to live a life of fleshly delights with the same fervor among that he earlier gave to them when they were spiritual. This systematic approach to hedonism is especially evident in how he approaches his relationship with Kamala, who he intentionally decides will be his teacher of passion, reshaping himself to try and satisfy her high demands. Siddhartha slaves for Kamaswami in order to pay for Kamala's expensive services, and he considers it a learning experience. His steadfast dedication to this path exemplifies his Samana-influenced mentality—"He was certain that he would follow through on his goal as soon as he made it" (Hesse, 1922)—illustrating how he employs ascetic concentration in the pursuit of sensual experiences, preserving psychological detachment while fully engaging in worldly pleasures.

Siddhartha's business partnership with Kamaswami, which grows under Kamala's strategic guidance, is marked by this strange mix of involvement and distance. Kamaswami is skeptical of Siddhartha's business acumen at first, but the former monk quickly proves his worth by being unexpectedly smart and literate. This creates

an unusual power dynamic: "He forced the merchant to deal with him as an equal, yes even more than an equal, because he was never subservient to him" (Hesse, 1922). Siddhartha learns how to run a business, but his lack of interest in money makes it a pointless game. This makes it hard for Kamaswami to get him to work harder by offering him a share of the profits. His Samana background makes him feel detached, which lets him see how ordinary people suffer over material things. At the same time, it makes him feel an unexpected envy for their ability to care deeply about worldly things. This contradiction shows up as "a dying, muted voice that lamented and admonished him quietly" (Hesse, 1922) when he was most vulnerable.

Kamala likes that Siddhartha is detached, which she sees as a special bond between them. However, this same trait keeps their relationship from turning into real love. Instead, their interactions turn into highly skilled performances—"among the thirty or forty games that Kamala was familiar with, they performed the game of love" (Hesse, 1922)—where physical closeness and mental closeness are present but not emotional closeness. Their shared understanding of this limitation is evident in Siddhartha's statement—"Maybe there is no love for folks like us, but the childlike folks can" (Hesse, 1922)—

which underscores how their advanced self-awareness obstructs genuine attachment. Their conversations about Gotama not only hint at Kamala's future spiritual growth, but they also show how much Siddhartha was affected by meeting the Buddha. They also hint at Kamala's future pregnancy as an unexpected result of their relationship.

As time goes on, Siddhartha becomes more and more involved in the material world, learning everything there is to know about living well, from fine food and clothing to entertainment and erotic arts. The narrator notes that "He had experienced wealth, passion, and authority" (Hesse, 1922), but this mastery comes with a price to his soul. Slowly, "the world and sloth had steadily infiltrated Siddhartha's psyche; it made it heavy, exhausted, and put it to sleep" (Hesse, 1922). This shows how his initial ironic distance from materialism fades over time, replaced by the greed he once hated. This internal change makes things dangerously out of balance—his spiritual voice gets weaker while his senses get sharper—until twenty years later, when the physical signs of ageing on both him and Kamala, along with a series of bad dreams, make it clear that he needs to leave.

These prophetic dreams lead to Siddhartha's spiritual crisis, especially the one

where Kamala talks about following Gotama and then he finds her songbird dead in its cage. The narrator conveys the visceral impact—"He felt death in his heart as he awakened" (Hesse, 1922)—as the deceased bird emerges as a powerful symbol of his entrapment in sensual existence. Siddhartha's decision to throw it away is a metaphorical rejection of his empty life. This realisation is strengthened when he sees the signs of ageing on Kamala's face and understands how "lust was related to death" (Hesse, 2022). Overcome with disgust at his own physical decline—the scented hair, wine-stained lips, and spoilt body—he reaches a breaking point that leads him to leave the city life without warning.

This awakening corresponds with Kierkegaard's concept of surpassing the aesthetic phase, as Siddhartha's thorough investigation of sensory delights ultimately exposes their existential vacuity. His hard-won realisation that "one can't have pleasure without pain" (Hesse, 1922, p. 45) echoes Kierkegaard's observations about aesthetic limitations, while his recognition that "The world was beautiful, but it was also terrible" (Hesse, 1922, p.53) captures the dual awareness that propels him towards ethical inquiry. The dream's symbolic significance—the deceased bird symbolising his waning spirituality—acts as the impetus for his liberation from the

perpetual cycle of desire and suffering in Samsara. At the same time, Kamala's unconscious mirroring of his transformation—releasing her real songbird when she finds out he is leaving while also finding out she is pregnant—creates a strong symbolic link to Siddhartha's liberation and hints at what will happen next in the story.

The final analysis firmly places Siddhartha's experiences within Kierkegaard's philosophical framework, illustrating his initial embrace of hedonism—marked by pleasure-seeking, external validation, and the evasion of introspection—as quintessential characteristics of the aesthetic stage. However, his eventual disillusionment with sensual experiences illustrates Kierkegaard's fundamental thesis regarding the inevitable stagnation of aesthetic pleasures, thereby substantiating the philosophical claim through narrative representation. Siddhartha's journey shows that neither extreme asceticism nor unchecked indulgence can lead to enlightenment. Instead, worldly experience is necessary for growth, but getting stuck in either mode stops ultimate understanding. The dead songbird dream marks the critical juncture at which aesthetic existence becomes psychologically insupportable, compelling Siddhartha to confront the necessity for meaning beyond sensory pleasure and facilitating his progression towards

Kierkegaard's ethical stage of existence.

### THE ETHICAL SIDDHARTHA

Siddhartha goes through a spiritual crisis after years of enjoying physical pleasures and material wealth. He goes through a metaphorical death, which is hinted at in a dream where Kamala's prized songbird is dead in its cage. This is a sign of how he feels trapped in the world. He leaves Kamala and Kamaswami without warning because he knows that he can't reach enlightenment in this state. He is too sad to stay with them. He is so miserable that he thinks about killing himself by drowning in a river, but he is saved when he falls asleep on the banks. While he sleeps, he hears the holy sound "Om," which means he is spiritually reborn. When he wakes up, Govinda, his childhood friend who is now a Buddhist monk, is watching over him. At first, Govinda doesn't recognise him. Govinda says that Siddhartha looks different now that he is no longer an ascetic Samana but a rich man. Siddhartha, on the other hand, thinks he is neither of these things. He wants to find a new path. Siddhartha looks for meaning and finds Vasudeva, a wise ferryman whose calmness he admires. Vasudeva says that he has peace because he has listened to the river for many years. Siddhartha wants to stay and learn, and Vasudeva agrees to take him on as a student. As time goes on, Siddhartha gains deep spiritual

insight. He sees the unity of all things and hears the divine "Om" in the river's flow.

But his last test comes when Kamala, who is now a pilgrim looking for the dying Buddha, shows up with their young son. A snake bites her and kills her. Before she dies, she tells him that Siddhartha is the boy's father. Siddhartha is now in charge of his son, who is spoilt and grew up in the city. The boy doesn't like their simple life. Siddhartha loves and cares for the boy, but he runs away and steals money from both Vasudeva and Siddhartha. Siddhartha is heartbroken and chases him, but in the end, he knows that his son must find his own way. Vasudeva comforts Siddhartha and leads him back to the river to get wisdom. Siddhartha learns the last lesson of letting go through this loss, which brings him closer to enlightenment. The river's lessons help him accept that life, suffering, and peace are all part of a cycle.

Siddhartha is very unhappy with his shallow life among the "child-people" because he knows he has used up all of the pleasures of the world. "He had tasted all and had drained everything out of his present existence... and that he was dissatisfied with it" (Hesse, 1922). The death of Kamala's songbird in his dream represents his own spiritual death, which makes him think that staying in the city would mean a

slow, painful death. He wonders if there is any experience that hasn't been ruined: "Was there still anything he hadn't polluted himself with... a gloominess in his spirit that he hadn't brought upon himself?" (Hesse, 1922). The city has become a prison for his spirit, and all he can think about is "the intense, agonising desire to end this awful and humiliating life" (Hesse, 1922).

Siddhartha, in a state of despair, runs away from the city and thinks about killing himself by the river. He thinks about how he has tried to find enlightenment by being both ascetic and indulgent, and he sees self-destruction as his only choice: "Let the fishes and crocodiles eat him, and let the daemons rip him to pieces!" (Hesse, 1922). At his lowest point, the sacred "Om" rises from his subconscious, awakening his dormant spirit and showing him how foolish his suicidal thoughts are (Hesse, 1922). This brief connection to the divine—"just a second" (Hesse, 1922)—saves him, and he falls asleep as if he were meditating on Om for a long time.

When he wakes up, he sees Govinda, who is now a Buddhist monk, but at first, he doesn't recognise him. Siddhartha tells Govinda about his changed state: "The wheel of physical manifestations is turning quickly." Where is the Brahmin Siddhartha? Where can I find Siddhartha the Samana? "Where is Siddhartha,

the wealthy man?" (Hesse, 1922, p. 83). He talks about his cyclical journey and how he had to "become a fool" and "commit sin" to find Atman again (Hesse, 1922). Govinda is still not sure, but Siddhartha has a new respect for the river that almost killed him. The water, which had once been a sign of his despair, now holds the promise of wisdom: "He had never appreciated water so much as he did now" (Hesse, 1922). The river teaches him, marking both an end and a new beginning. The "old, tired, and hopeless Siddhartha" died in it, but the new one stays, drawn to its flow.

According to Kierkegaard, societal norms that guide behavior are considered ethics. Ethics often take precedence over personal desires. The ethical life is based on rational rules that benefit society, so personal interests should align with these norms. It's possible to have fun while living a moral life. People who prioritize ethics tend to contribute positively to society and coexist harmoniously. An ethical person considers the impact of their actions on others and prioritizes the greater good over personal interests. Living an ethical life can also bring its own rewards. When Siddhartha meets the river, he learns that the past influences life but doesn't dictate the future. This realization gives him the courage to continue his journey to enlightenment. After a transformative

experience by the river, Siddhartha emerges reborn, having undergone a profound change. This transformation is different from his earlier attempt to break free from his past. Instead, it connects his present to his past, confronting it head-on. Through memories, the past informs the present, serving as a vital link between the two. Siddhartha realizes that trying to control his life was a mistake, as he's subject to the flow of time. Despite his experiences and travels, he feels he's gained nothing. However, the river offers him new insight and guidance. He learns that true wisdom comes from following his intuition, rather than planning every step. This lesson in "right conduct" from Buddhism teaches him to let go of rigid plans and trust his inner path.

Arrival of Om signals Siddhartha's spiritual rebirth and the final leg of his journey to enlightenment. Om embodies life, and its presence in Siddhartha's life helps him rediscover life's true essence. When Siddhartha is on the brink of despair, Om awakens him to a higher state, reminding him of his past wisdom and spiritual experiences. The lessons he's learned resurface, proving essential for his future growth. Om is introduced early on as a key concept in Brahmin teachings. It appears to Siddhartha, awakening him and saving him from darkness. Later, Om's presence is felt through the river's

voice, guiding Siddhartha toward enlightenment. After hearing Om, Siddhartha experiences a profound awakening and gains new insight. Having explored extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial, Siddhartha is now poised to find a balanced path to enlightenment. A pivotal conversation between Siddhartha and Vasudeva explores the nature of time. Siddhartha comes to understand that life is like a river, where past, present, and future are connected. He learns that divisions between different life stages are mere illusions, not reality. This realization is Siddhartha's path to Nirvana. The book's core revolves around this mystical understanding of timelessness and unity with the universe. The conversation concludes with Siddhartha linking pain to time, a recurring theme. The river symbolizes all existence and awareness, echoing the collective unconscious and the eternal OM. It brings ancestral wisdom to the surface. Siddhartha and Vasudeva, united as ferrymen, become spiritual brothers, merging with the sacred river.

As time passes, Siddhartha's spiritual healing progresses. Through solitude, he realizes that his ego, not his true self, has died. This painful process of self-discovery leads to integration, balance, and inner peace. Siddhartha reflects on salvation, still guided by his inner voice. Renewed and innocent, he finds joy in the river's

flow. The river becomes a catalyst for Siddhartha's deeper self-exploration, facilitating a journey of self-discovery. The river teaches Siddhartha that time is an illusion and the present moment is key. Siddhartha realizes that all living things are interconnected, like the river's unified flow. Hesse uses the river as a metaphor for existence, echoing Taoist philosophy, which emphasizes the balance of Tao – a universal force that connects all things, leading to ultimate harmony and fulfillment. The Yin Yang, a key Taoist symbol, features interlocking black and white elements. It represents the harmonious balance of opposites. Siddhartha's final chapter explores this theme. The river, with its constant flow, embodies contradictions like change and stability, time and eternity. Siddhartha realizes he can't achieve enlightenment without embracing the coexistence of these opposing forces.

The river's constant nature persists despite its vast reach. Siddhartha mirrors the river, his core self unchanged despite life's shifts. He sees his life as a river, deducing that time is illusory. Guided by Vasudeva and the river, Siddhartha uncovers the final pieces of enlightenment. The river's true meaning, as taught by Vasudeva, lies in its ability to teach Siddhartha, starting with the art of listening. All knowledge resides in the present, and Siddhartha can access it from his current

state. Siddhartha understands that all knowledge is accessible in the present moment. He realizes that time is an illusion and that everything can be learned from the here and now. By letting go of distractions like boredom, fear of time, and anxiety about life's brevity, Siddhartha can achieve enlightenment.

Kierkegaard claims that aesthetics rejects routine, as repetition can lead to boredom. An ethical person makes moral choices based on higher principles, rather than seeking novelty. Marriage is an example of a moral commitment that transcends fleeting desires. While the initial excitement may fade, ethical commitment reveals deeper joys in prioritizing the other's well-being. However, living an ethical life doesn't necessarily lead to spiritual growth, as adherence to societal norms can distract from inner exploration. Kierkegaard believes that self-reflection is essential for faith, a key aspect of a truly religious life. Siddhartha learns about "right endeavor" through his relationship with his son, realizing that one can't impose timeless understanding on someone bound by time. His son feels Siddhartha is trying to mold him in his image, despite Siddhartha's unawareness. The son ultimately sees Siddhartha as a stranger. Vasudeva advises Siddhartha that the boy's path is his own to determine, but Siddhartha, driven by love, overlooks this wisdom.

He has personally discovered that enlightenment can't be taught, only achieved through inner guidance. Siddhartha tries to control his son's life, imposing his own views, repeating the same pattern his father once imposed on him. His son, like Siddhartha before him, breaks free to follow his own path.

Siddhartha's journey to enlightenment involved navigating the material world, but he hadn't yet confronted the challenge of love. The birth of his son forces him to face this test. Despite finding peace as a ferryman, Siddhartha's lack of experience with love leaves him vulnerable. He tries to impose his will on his son, forgetting that true enlightenment comes from within, driven by the complexities of love. Siddhartha previously emphasized that enlightenment must come from within, but his actions with his son contradict this belief. Vasudeva highlights this inconsistency, which Siddhartha should logically recognize. His love for his son has led him to abandon his core conviction. Siddhartha reflects on how he had once forced his father to let him pursue his spiritual path, leaving his father to suffer, and now he understands the same pain as a parent.

According to Kierkegaard's philosophy, the ethical stage is the second stage of human life and is distinguished by universal principles

(accepting moral rules and societal standards), moral responsibility, and obligation (putting moral values ahead of personal interests). When Siddhartha acknowledges the pain of others and works to lessen it, he is a perfect example of the ethical stage and moral duty. He accepts universal principles as a framework for morality and pledges to walk the correct road. He embraces a modest, austere existence and condemns luxury. He exercises self-control, self-discipline, and meditation. He is selfless and exhibits empathy and compassion. He also experiences an internal struggle between his longing for his former life and his goal for spiritual development. But even though he strictly adheres to moral standards, he feels spiritually barren. "The teaching of the Buddha was like a precious jewel." (Hesse, 1922, p. 83). He is aware of the inflexibility and constraints of moral standards and has an internal conflict between his emotional and intellectual selves. "But I could not fulfill it, I could not become perfect." (Hesse, 1922, p. 101). Because of his discontent with the ethical stage, Siddhartha moves on to the religious stage in search of a more profound and intimate spiritual connection.

### THE RELIGIOUS SIDDHARTHA

Siddhartha transcends his pain by recognizing the cyclical pattern of father-son conflict. He understands that true wisdom lies in the

awareness of life's unity, which is a subtle yet profound realization. This awareness is not about intellectual superiority but about a soul's capacity to sense unity in all aspects of life. Siddhartha's long search culminates in this realization, facilitated by his experiences and the river's wisdom, ultimately leading him to understand the oneness of the universe. Siddhartha understands the interconnectedness of the universe, the eternity of life, and the importance of realizing oneness for spiritual fulfillment. Vasudeva guides him in uncovering the river's secrets. Observing the river, Siddhartha has an epiphany: all life is part of an eternal cycle, like river water flowing into the ocean and being replenished by rain. He realizes that every stage of life is connected in an unending whole. Understanding life's meaning requires recognizing that all opposites are part of this unity. Once Siddhartha has learned from the river, Vasudeva departs, leaving Siddhartha to take on his role as ferryman.

Siddhartha grieves for his son, overcome with pain and sorrow. One day, gazing into the river, he realizes that life flows uncontrollably, like the river's current. The water seems to mock him for dwelling on his pain. As he bends to look closer, he sees his reflection in the calm water and is struck by its familiarity. The face reminds him of his father's, and he recalls how he had left his

father to pursue his spiritual path, causing him pain. He realizes his father must have suffered similarly for him as he now suffers for his son. Had his father not passed away recently, by himself, without ever seeing his son again? Did he not have to anticipate meeting the same end himself? Was this recurrence, this circling about in a fatal circle, not a farce, an odd and foolish matter? (Hesse, 1922). Siddhartha reflects on how he had left his father despite opposition, and now his own son has left him. This parallel fills him with compassion for both his father and son. He realizes that certain sufferings are inevitable and will repeat themselves across generations. The river seems to echo this truth, suggesting that unresolved pain will recur. Siddhartha returns to his hut, conflicted, mocked by the river, and torn between despair and a sense of cosmic irony. (Hesse, 1922). A new calm washes over Siddhartha. He opens up to Vasudeva, sharing his deepest feelings and grief. Vasudeva seems to absorb it all, allowing Siddhartha to reveal even the most painful truths. He shares his wounds, his escape, and his humiliation, like bathing his pain in the river. As he speaks, Siddhartha feels himself merging with the moment, and Vasudeva's presence becomes almost transcendent, beyond human. This still listener was taking in his confession like a tree taking in rain; this still man

was the river itself; he was God; he was the eternal self (Hesse, 1922). Siddhartha discovers that Vasudeva appears to be a deity and is equally as enlightened as the Buddha.

Let me now go as it has arrived. I've been waiting for this hour—I've been Vasudeva the ferryman for a long time. It's plenty for now. Goodbye, Siddhartha, hut, river, and all of you!" (Hesse, 1922, p. 121). Upon observing this, Vasudeva declares that he has been waiting for this very time before leaving Siddhartha, serving as the ferryman and heading into the jungle, grinning broadly and saying, "I'm heading into the forests, I'm going into the oneness," smiling brightly and walking away, leaving Siddhartha in his wake. When Siddhartha sees Vasudeva going with both profound delight and profound solemnity, the former sees his body full of light and feeling his head full of brilliance, and his steps full of calm (Hesse, 1922, p. 121). Kierkegaard believes the religious life is the highest form of existence, but few truly live it. He's concerned with being a genuine Christian amidst false religiosity. According to him, a personal relationship with God is paramount, and institutions like the church can distract from this. Siddhartha's journey to enlightenment requires letting go of attachments, with love for his son being the most challenging. Despite this,

Siddhartha's feelings as a father mirror those he had as a son, highlighting a universal human experience. Siddhartha sees his reflection in the river, overlaid with his father's image, symbolizing shared experiences. He realizes his son will follow a similar path, making choices like he did. Despite his knowledge, Siddhartha is repeating patterns from his past, just as his father did. These parallels suggest that time collapses into the present, containing a wealth of experiences. Siddhartha understands that beneath life's fluctuations, he is both himself and connected to all others in the universe.

Siddhartha finds humanity in suffering, reconciling his past, present, and future roles. Through suffering, he connects with all creation, shedding his sense of superiority. Suffering reveals his shared humanity, fostering compassion essential for enlightenment. Both Siddhartha and Vasudeva have overcome pain, returning to the divine. Their triumph over suffering enables enlightenment. According to Kierkegaard's philosophy, the Religious Stage is the pinnacle of human existence and is marked by leaps of faith (embracing uncertainty and transcending rational understanding), spiritual awakening (a profound personal experience of the divine), and individual subjective experience (putting one's own faith above universal principles). The Religious Stage is

best shown by Siddhartha's meeting with Vasudeva and his ensuing spiritual enlightenment. He feels a strong bond with the river, which is a representation of the holy, divine. "The river flowed without pause, and yet it was always still." (Hesse, 1922, p. 143). By going beyond Buddhist teachings, accepting the mystery of life, and putting his own experience ahead of doctrine, he takes a leap of faith. The river is a metaphor for life, change, and eternity, while Siddhartha's unification with it is a mystical experience. He discovers calm, inner peace, and acceptance of the present moment. "I will listen to the river, and it will teach me." (Hesse, 1922, p.147). Siddhartha hears the global sound "Om," which stands for unification, and his inner guidance. He experiences non-dual thinking and overcomes the boundaries between self and other. As he embraces the universal, his ego fades. He combines knowledge with passion, and his experience is rich and intimate.

## CONCLUSION

The aforementioned discussion suggests that reality is dynamic, and the search for life's purpose is an ongoing process. The protagonist's journey mirrors a Kierkegaardian existentialist quest, navigating the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages to attain spiritual insight and ultimate reality. This journey explores fundamental

questions of human existence and divine reality, highlighting possibilities for self-realization through existentialist inquiry. The study reveals that Siddhartha's life reflects profound concerns and meanings, hinting at life's purpose and lasting goals. The question of life's greater purpose has puzzled people throughout history, with diverse traditions offering varied perspectives. Ultimately, the answer is personal, and individuals find meaning in different ways, shaped by their unique experiences and beliefs. People find meaning in various ways, such as relationships, art, service, spirituality, self-actualization, or knowledge. Siddhartha's journey suggests that each person's path to understanding reality is unique, and individual insights may not be universally applicable. Nonetheless, exploring these aspects can foster personal growth, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of what truly matters. The study has suggested that we have a higher purpose in life, with inherent imperatives that benefit both individuals and communities. However, our minds can't fully grasp the reality of our inner mission. The study proposes that we're endowed with profound intelligence, or Knowledge, allowing us to embark on a journey of self-discovery. Those who see themselves as solely physical beings may resist this journey, fearing the unknown and attachment, and instead find

comfort in familiar suffering. Even strong individuals on a path to self-realization may be swayed back into the world of desires and senses, losing their way due to their powerful pull. The study has explored the protagonist's existentialist journey, leading to self-realization and answers about life. Self-awareness has immense power, allowing us to control our own actions. This journey involves destroying the false self, which most people focus on developing and satisfying. True self-realization requires letting go of self-consciousness, future anxieties, and conditioning, accessing a timeless, silent state. The path to self-realization demands significant sacrifice, and the journey itself is more important than the destination. Casual interest won't suffice; one needs intense passion and dedication to truly pursue this path, going beyond superficial explorations. The study concludes that Siddhartha's journey mirrors Kierkegaard's three stages of life, reflecting humanity's ongoing spiritual search for answers. Our experiences guide us toward enlightenment. Sometimes, intense searching can blind us to simple truths. According to Hesse, true discovery requires being open and free from goals, rather than fixating on a specific outcome.

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